

Belvidere Hill Historic District

Lowell's National Register
Neighborhoods



LOWELL HISTORIC BOARD

The Belvidere Hill Historic District is the best preserved example of Lowell's finer late 19th century residential neighborhoods. The area's natural topography provided views across the city and encouraged the development of large, stylish residences. The homes in the District are important examples of the Italianate, Second Empire, Queen Anne, Richardsonian Romanesque, Shingle, and Colonial Revival styles. Residents of Belvidere Hill were among Lowell's business, industrial, political, and social leaders.



Early Development

Development of the Belvidere Hill area in the 1840s reflected the development of new residential neighborhoods for Lowell's growing middle class of successful businessmen, entrepreneurs, and professionals. Originally part of Tewksbury, the area was known as Lynde's Hill and by the 1820s, three large farms occupied the area.

The 150 acre Gedney farm was one of the largest. In 1816 it was purchased by Judge Edward Livermore who renamed the property "Belvidere" which translates from Italian as "beautiful to behold." Judge Livermore was renown for his public reputation and fine hospitality and he created a sophisticated image for the area. In 1834, Belvidere Hill was annexed to Lowell from Tewksbury.

Right:
194
Nesmith
Street



Fairmount Street experienced early development due to its proximity to the Lynde's Hill Reservoir. In 1849, Locks and Canals built a reservoir to provide fire protection for the textile mills. An old road to Tewksbury extended up the hill and the area was sold off for house lots in the 1850s and 1860s. In 1996, the reservoir was lost due to new residential development.

Left:
110
Mansur
Street

Development of Belvidere Hill was also influenced by horse-drawn streetcar lines. Lowell's first horse-drawn railway line ran along Pawtucket, Merrimack, and East Merrimack Streets to the base of Belvidere Hill in 1864. By 1890, the line had been electrified and extended along Nesmith Street, further encouraging residential development.

Architectural Development

Most of Belvidere Hill's residences were erected over a 100 year period, from 1845 to 1945. The first house lots were sold off on the Hill in the 1850s and 1860s while many other lots sold in the decades after the Civil War.

Right: The first homes in the
33 District were built in the
Fairview Italianate style, inspired by
Street the architecture of Italian villas. The Darius Brown House (33 Fairview Street; 1874) was the first home to be built near the crest of Belvidere Hill. Its Italianate details include round arched window hoods and a bracketed cornice. Other Italianate residences include the District's oldest surviving property, the Reverend Samuel Pratt House (194 Nesmith Street; 1849) and the Aaron Blanchard House (31 Talbot Street; 1878).



Right: Houses in the Second Empire style are close relatives of
52 the Italianate. The primary difference is the mansard
Mansur roof form. The Levi
Street Sprague House's (52 Mansur Street; 1867) slate mansard roof is interrupted by a bell-shaped gable while pedimented dormers puncture the roofline. Among other Second



Empire homes in the District are the James Abbott House (24 Fairmount Street; ca. 1868), the Martha Rogers House (46 Fairmount Street; ca. 1874), and the Asa Hill House (62 Fairmount Street; ca. 1872).

Victorian homes built in the District between the 1870s and 1890s are mainly Queen Anne, Stick, and Shingle

styles. The term “Victorian” actually embraces several different styles of architecture found in the District. Examples of the Richardsonian Romanesque and Chateausque styles also date from this era.

Right:
166
Fairmount
Street



The Albion Taylor House (166 Fairmount Street; ca. 1876) combines Italianate and Stick style elements. Stick style homes stress the wall surface as a decorative

feature. The Taylor house’s truss-like supports porch detail echo the Stick style while the house’s basic mass and window hoods are more Italianate. The James Francis House (80 Mansur Street; 1886) is a more fully developed example of the Stick style with its sawn-eave trusses at the roof line.

A variety of new styles were introduced in the 1880s beginning with the Chateausque style Arthur Bonney Estate (236 Fairmount Street; 1883). The Chateausque style is based upon 16th century French chateaus. The Bonney Estate’s tall hipped slate roof and tower and the rear carriage house’s steep hipped roof, cupola, and rounded corner tower with conical roof are all Chateausque features.

Many examples the Queen Anne style exist from the 1880s. Queen Anne residences include the James W.B. Shaw House (47 Belmont Avenue; ca. 1885), the Arthur Pollard House (110 Mansur Street; 1885), the John Howe House (85 Fairmount Street; 1887), and the William Lamson House (209 Nesmith Street; 1891).

Shingle style homes are similar in style to the Queen Anne, the distinguishing feature being the wooden shingle. The John Faulkner House’s (32 Belmont Avenue;

Right:
32
Belmont
Avenue



is ornamented with applied woodwork. A matching Shingle style carriage house sits to the rear.

By 1900, the Colonial Revival style had become popular and remained the most commonly used style on Belvidere Hill for the next forty years. The Henry Tibbetts House (124 Mansur Street; 1904) is one of the most imposing

Right:
124
Mansur
Street



1887) form is a complex series of gables, turrets, round towers, and tall chimneys. Plain and patterned shingles enrich the surface while the front gable

Colonial Revival residences in Lowell with its full two story portico supported by four Corinthian columns. Many other Colonial Revival homes

are scattered throughout Belvidere Hill including the Alice and Lina Parker House (57 Belmont Avenue; 1898), the Sarah Francis House (68 Mansur Street; ca. 1895), the Lawrence Manufacturing Company Agent's House (53 Mansur Street; ca. 1899), and the Thomas Elliott House (25 Fairview Street; 1903).

Right:
85
Fairmount
Street

The Queen Anne Style

Many homes built in the 1880s and 1890s on Belvidere Hill were constructed in the Queen Anne style, some with matching carriage houses. Queen Anne homes are one of many styles that comprise the Victorian era. The style takes its name from the reign of an 18th century English queen and were initially inspired by medieval country cottages. These homes generally have a rambling plan and irregular rooflines and are highly decorative. This effect was often achieved by combining building materials, colors, and textures. The combining of masonry, shingles, clapboards, and panels of wood ornament may occur all on one building.

One of the District's most outstanding Queen Anne residences is the John Howe House (85 Fairmount Street; 1887). Its surfaces are a combination of masonry and patterned shingles, with patterned wood decoration in the north gable. The main entrance is recessed behind a broad stone arch. On the north elevation is a fine porte-cochere which combines a stickwork gable with stone footings. A rear carriage house echoes the design of the main house.



The Frederick Faulkner House

As designed and partially rebuilt in 1903 following a fire six years earlier, the Frederick Faulkner House (86 Belmont Avenue; 1890/1903) was built in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. This style was also adopted for several key Lowell public buildings of this era, including City Hall, Pollard Memorial Library, and the former Post Office on Appleton Street.

Constructed of rough-faced granite blocks, the Frederick Faulkner House occupies a commanding site at the crest of Belvidere Hill. Bands of arched and rectangular windows encircle the building and the engaged turrets with conical roofs. An arched stone porte-cochere projects from a similarly arched entrance supported by squat groups of polished granite columns.

Rare in residential buildings, Richardsonian Romanesque was popular for public and institutional buildings. Named for influential Boston architect H.H. Richardson, other architects emulated his designs after his death in 1886. Richardsonian Romanesque houses are always constructed of masonry, often rough-faced squared stonework. Wide, rounded arches and deeply recessed door and window openings are also key features of the style.

Faulkner, whose brother John resided at 32 Belmont Avenue, was a partner in the Faulkner Woolen Mills in North Billerica.



Who's Who on Belvidere Hill

Right:
Detail,
32
Belmont
Avenue

Among the District's early residents were many of Lowell's leaders in business, politics, and social affairs. At 194 Nesmith Street lived Reverend Samuel Pratt in the 1840s. Next door at 21 Nesmith Street, William Burke, superintendent of the Lowell Machine Shop and later an agent of the Boott Mills, built his home. Charles Stott, agent and treasurer of the Belvidere Woolen Mills lived at 173 Nesmith Street. John and Frederick Faulkner, partners in the Faulkner Woolen Mills, erected imposing residences at 32 and 86 Belmont Avenue. 52 Belmont Avenue was the home of Alexander Cumnock, agent of the Boott Mills and a founder of the Lowell Textile Institute.



Left:
86
Belmont
Avenue

Successful Lowell merchants and professionals also built their homes on Belvidere Hill. Arthur G. Pollard, owner of a prominent dry goods store, lived at 110 Mansur Street. Albion C. Taylor, who resided at 166 Fairmount Street, co-owned Cook, Taylor, & Co., a dry goods and ladies clothing store. Attorney James Abbott built his 24 Fairmount Street home in 1868. Asa Hill, a dealer in sheet music and a music teacher, built his house at 62 Fairmount Street. Henry Tibbetts, whose home is at 124 Mansur Street, was manager of a lumber business. Thomas Elliott, of 25 Fairview Street, was a local real estate developer.

Many of Lowell's political figures lived on Belvidere Hill. Stephen Mansur lived at 172 Nesmith Street, later selling it to George Richardson. Both were mayors of Lowell, as were James Abbott and Charles Stott. Arthur Bonney, at 236 Fairmount Street, served as city solicitor for a number of years. Many of the District's residents served as directors and trustees of Lowell's banks and philanthropic institutions.

The National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's resources worthy of preservation for their architectural, historical, or cultural value. The National Register was established in 1966 as a list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, and culture. Buildings that have contributed to the development of the Nation and the Commonwealth, which are over fifty years old and not altered significantly, may be eligible.

Listing on the National Register does not place restrictions or limitations on the use, alteration, or disposition of private property. Listing does provide some protection from adverse action due to Federal or State funding, permitting, or licensing. Additionally, certain property owners who rehabilitate income-producing certified historic properties may be eligible for federal tax credits.

The Lowell Historic Board

Established by state statute in 1983, the Lowell Historic Board serves to preserve and protect the historic and architectural resources of the Downtown Lowell Historic District while encouraging economic development and tourism in the District's historic setting. As the City of Lowell's historic preservation agency, the Board also maintains the city's inventory of historic structures and sites. The Board also provides technical assistance and information on preservation to property owners citywide in addition to publishing educational and outreach materials and sponsoring several workshops and events throughout the year.

Resources

For additional information about the Belvidere Hill Historic District, other National Register or historic sites in Lowell, and historic preservation, contact:

Lowell Historic Board

J.F.K. Civic Center
50 Arcand Drive
Lowell, MA 01852
(508) 970-4270

For additional information about the National Register, contact:

Massachusetts Historical Commission

220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125
(617) 727-8470

National Register of Historic Places

Interagency Resources Division
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127
(202) 343-9536

For information on architectural styles, preservation, and restoration, try:

A Field Guide to American Houses

Virginia and Lee McAlester
New York: Alfred A. Knopf (1985)

The Old House Journal Guide to Restoration

Patricia Poore, editor
Old House Journal Corporation
(1992)

As you explore the Belvidere Hill Historic District, please respect the rights of property owners by not trespassing and remaining on public property as you view the many historic resources of the District.

This brochure is based upon the National Register of Historic Places registration form for the Belvidere Hill Historic District (Margo B. Webber with Betsy Friedberg, 1994) on file at the Lowell Historic Board, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and the National Register of Historic Places, Washington, D.C.

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